

MONTANA FISH WILDLIFE & PARKS

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Attached is the Socio-Economic Assessment for the Garrity Mtn./Clear Creek Acquisition. This accompanies the Environmental Assessment and Management Plan sent earlier for this proposed acquisition.

GARRITY MTN./CLEAR CREEK

FEE TITLE ACQUISITION

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

Prepared by:
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I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the fee title purchase of property presently owned by the YT Timber. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed fee title acquisition.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The YT Timber property is located near Anaconda, Mt. in Deer Lodge County. The property that MFWP would acquire encompasses approximately 9000 acres on Garrity Mtn. and in the Clear Creek drainage. A detailed description of this property is included in the environmental assessment (EA).

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

Vegetation consists of timber, native grasslands and riparian areas. Elk, deer, bighorn sheep, and black bears utilize the land as well as a host of other species. The native grasslands are in excellent condition and provide critical winter forage for wildlife.

C. Current Use

The YT Timber property is predominately timber land and has been commercially logged.

D. Management Alternatives

- 1) Purchase the property fee title by the Rocky Mtn. Elk Foundation using Upper Clark Fork Restoration Fund and donate the title to MFWP
- 2) No purchase

Alternative 1, the fee title purchase will provide long-term protection for of the native habitats and wildlife this land sustains, while allowing YT Timber to continue to harvest timber from the land, up to 5.3 million board feet.

The second alternative, the no purchase option, does not guarantee the protection of this parcel from significant levels of timber harvest that would negatively impact wildlife habitat, fisheries, and scenic quality. The no purchase alternative also does not protect the lands from subdivision or recreational development.

MFWP Fee Title Purchase

The intent of the YT Timber land purchase is to protect and enhance the wildlife habitat currently found on the property while maintaining the overall character of the land.

No Purchase Alternative

This alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property will vary depending on what the current owners decide to do with the property if this transaction does not happen. Planned timber harvest is much higher under this alternative, impacting the habitat and wildlife to a much greater degree than if the fee purchase terms occur. The economic impacts associated with this alternative have not been calculated.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The fee title purchase will provide long term protection of important wildlife habitat, and provide for public access. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the fee title transfer to MFWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures may have on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts to MFWP are related to the maintenance/management costs associated with managing this land. RMEF has stated they will raise \$100,000 for a fund to assist with the management costs. MFWP will be able to use these funds until they are depleted.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the fee title purchase. The YT Timber sale to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and subsequent title transfer to MFWP will not change the tax revenues that Deerlodge County currently collects on this piece of property. MFWP is required by Montana Code 87-1-603 to pay "to the county a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen."

B. Economic Impacts

The fee title purchase will not affect the commercial timber activities by the YT Timber. Consequently there will not be any significant financial impacts to local businesses associated with the timber industry in the next seven years.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted at the beginning of this document, the YT Timber is located in DeerLodge County near Anaconda, MT.

The fee title purchase by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and title transfer to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks will provide long term protection for wildlife habitat, maintain the open space integrity of the land, ensure public recreation opportunities and continue to ensure commercial timber harvest by YT Timber into the immediate future.

The fee title purchase and title transfer to MFWP will not cause a reduction in tax revenues on this property from their current levels to DeerLodge County under Montana Code 97-1-603.

The commercial timber operations will continue at their current levels. The financial impacts of the fee title purchase on local businesses will be neutral to positive in both the short and long run.